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UNCLAS PARIS 008659

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DHS FOR TSA, ICE/CBP, AND ICE/FOREIGN OPS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AIR FRANCE DISCUSSES ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR  
PROCESSING FLIGHT CREW VISAS

REF: Paris 7216

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a meeting with Emboffs December 21, Air France officials expressed concern about the cost of processing visas for crewmembers. Air France estimates that it requires approximately 6000 visas per year at a cost in lost crew time and other expenses it claims could reach five million euros. Air France proposed a number of possible alternatives, and said they would also be raising the issue directly with DHS. END SUMMARY

12. (SBU) Guy Tardieu, Air France Vice-President for External Relations and Chief of Staff to Chairman Jean-Cyril Spinetta and two staffers met with Emboffs December 21 to discuss their concerns about the logistics and costs of providing crew visas to its 12,000 flight crewmembers who might need to enter the U.S. Air France estimates that its crewmembers will need 5-6,000 visas per year, at a total annual cost to the airline of approximately five million euros. (Its unions insist that Air France foot the bill for wages and travel expenses due to the U.S. requirement that applicants personally appear for a fingerprint scan).

13. (SBU) After noting that Air France was moving ahead with its own program of creating a biometric database of all its employees, Tardieu and his staff reviewed a number of alternatives for visa processing that they believed could save them time and money. Most involved collection and/or processing of biometric data for crewmembers at Air France facilities, (using either Air France or USG equipment), followed by secure transmission to U.S. authorities for visa adjudication and issuance. Collection could be supervised by French police or a U.S.-appointed supervisor (at Air France expense). One transmission option would be to embed fingerprints in the Master Crew List, which Air France already provides to the USG on a regular basis via the French Border Police.

14. (SBU) Emboffs noted a number of potential difficulties any such proposal raised. While technically possible, indirect collection of biometric data outside of channels directly controlled by the USG could be seen as implying mutual recognition of security arrangements, a broad and sensitive issue that would need high-level negotiation and decision. A more viable option might be to link fingerprint scans of crewmembers done at entry by USG officials to visa applications; it was unclear to us however if this was technically possible. Even use of prior scans for visa renewals would require changes in DHS regulations currently in force, we warned.

15. (SBU) Moreover, Emboffs argued that if special arrangements were made for Air France, other airlines would surely request them, including those with less than sterling reputations for screening and security. It would perhaps be preferable for Air France to envisage a collective solution in cooperation with other large airlines. Tardieu agreed that this was a common problem. Following Air France Chairman Spinetta's October proposal to the Ambassador (reftel), he had recently talked to CBP about having Air France serve along with other airlines as a pilot tester of DHS's program to allow transmission of passenger data to the U.S. for name-checking before take-off (Secure Flight). Perhaps the issue could be raised in that context as well, he said.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Post passes along Air France's ideas for information purposes only at this time. We would appreciate any additional information that emerges from Air France discussions with CBP or other USG agencies about participation in the DHS pilot program. END COMMENT.

STAPLETON